

# The god Alexander. Theological comments in a marble votive relief of the 3rd century A.C. from Florina

By Konstantinos Kottis



Photo 1

This marble votive relief (photo 1) was discovered in 1957 and comes from the villages Skopos and Achlada of Florina Prefecture in Greece, very close to the borders between Greece and FYROM. A few kilometers from the finding position, at the side of FYROM, is the archaeological area of Greek ancient city “Heraclea Lygistikis”. It was the most important city of Lygistikis region of ancient Macedonia. It is

important to mention that the city was first associated with the Greek King of Macedonia Amyntas and then by his son Philip II (359-336 B.C.), father of Alexander (III) the Great (336-323 B.C.)<sup>1</sup>. A common feature of both, was that they have honored with a divine cult.

The study of the relief was published in 1985<sup>2</sup>. Dates to the 3rd century AD and it's a part of the permanent collection of the Archaeological Museum of Florina (no. 11). The central theme is the divine cult of the legendary Macedonian royal family. We know the divine cult (in gr: "apotheosis" / in lat. "consecratio") of Amyntas in a temple dedicated to him (maybe a temple - tomb ?) in ancient city of Pydna, but also the worship to Philip II in several cities of Greece, while he was still alive, not later than 343 BC<sup>3</sup>.

Probably this royal cult began, and it had centered Amphipolis. We also know that Alexander asked worship for himself / to enjoy divine honors when he was in Asia in 327 BC and later this cult was accepted by the Greek cities, after the Congress of Corinth in 324 BC, the year in which Hephaestion was allowed to become deified, literally on the funeral fire, though he was not a king<sup>4</sup>.

This votive relief is divided into three sections. In the upper part, which represents a vaulted building, the artist created two snakes - dragons which are faced

<sup>1</sup> «Ηράκλεια: Άμυντου τοῦ Φιλίππου κτίσμα» ("Heraclea built by King Amyntas"), A. Westermann (Gr. Edidit), *Stephani Byzantii Έθνικων quae supersunt* (Lipsiae, 1839), 134.

<sup>2</sup> Θ. Ριζάκης & Γ. Τουράτογλου, *Επιγραφές Ανω Μακεδονίας*, ΤΑΠ. 1985), 137-138, no. 148, and in <http://helios-eie.ekt.gr/EIE/handle/10442/148> (Date of recovery: 10-11-2016)

<sup>3</sup> «οὐθ' ὑπερβάλλοισθ' ἀν Αμφιπολίτας καὶ Πυδναίους, ὃν οἱ μὲν ἔθυον ὡς θεῶ, οἱ δὲ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ νεών εἶχον δεικνύναι οὐτε γὰρ τῆς ἀξίας τῆς ὑμετέρας τοὺς ἔξω θαυμάζειν», Aelios Aristides, «Συμμαχικός Α'», in *Aristides. ex recensione Guilielmi Dindorffii, Vol I*, 38 (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1829), 715. See also «Νῦν μὲν τὸν Μακεδόνα τὸν ἐκ Πέλλης τὸν Αμύντου Φίλιππον ἐν Κυνοσάργει νομοθετούντες προσκυνεῖν, τὸν "τὴν κλεῖν κατεαγότα καὶ τὸ σκέλος πεπηρωμένον", ὃς ἔξεικόπη τὸν ὄφθαλμόν» ("There is the case of the Macedonian Philip of Pella, the son of Amyntor, to whom they decreed divine worship in Cynosargus, although his collarbone was broken, and he had a lame leg, and had one of his eyes knocked out"), Clement of Alexandria, *Προτρεπτικὸς πρὸς Ἑλληνας*, PG 08, 149B.

<sup>4</sup> «Although Curtius presents at least some of the leading Macedonians, such as Philotas and his father, as being unhappy with Alexander's proclamation of his divine sonship after Siwah, major confrontation arose when he tried to introduce the Persian ceremony early in 327. According to two of our sources, Arrian and Curtius, Alexander's attempt is given in the context of being offered divine honours. In both accounts, the setting is a banquet followed by a debate, with Cleon (in Curtius' account; Anaxarchus in Arrian) speaking in favour of divine honours and Callisthenes as the voice of opposition in both», E. Baynham, «The question of macedonian divine honours for Philip II», *Mediterranean Archaeology* 7 (1994), 40. See also «ἐπεὶ καὶ προσκυνεῖσθαι ἐθέλειν Αλέξανδρον λόγος κατέχει, ὑπούστης μὲν αὐτῷ καὶ τῆς ἀμφὶ τοῦ Ἀμμωνος πατρὸς μᾶλλον τι ἡ Φιλίππου δόξης» ('Fore the tale goes that Alexander even desired people to bow to the earth before him, from the idea that Ammon was his father rather than Philip'), Arrianos, *Ἀνάβασις Ἀλεξάνδρου*, IV, 9, 9.

and intersect to an egg. I believe that this is the Orphic Egg of Creation<sup>5</sup>, which may placed, instead of the caduceus, which Hermes separated two snakes fighting, emphasizing a unifying character<sup>6</sup>. I may suggest the presence of Kaveiroi or Demeter and Persephone's temple in the area<sup>7</sup>. A cult which was supported by the Temenids royal dynasty and undoubtedly promoted to the also received divine honor Olympias, Queen of Macedonia, wife of Philip II and mother of Alexander the Great.

In the central point, from left to right, the sculptor gave the Alexander's portrait, in a form without long hair (photo 2), as typically the ancient Greek art usually modeled the legendary king. He holds a "parazonium" sword in a manner that usually depicted the Roman emperors (photo 3)<sup>8</sup>. It has been suggested that the sword

<sup>5</sup> «Ἡν γὰρ ὅδωρ ἀρχὴ κατ' αὐτὸν τοῖς ὄλοις, ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ ὕδατος ἰλὺς κατέστη, ἐκ δὲ ἑκατέρων ἐγεννήθη ζῶν δράκων προσπεφυκιαν ἔχων κεφαλὴν λέοντος, διὰ μέσου δὲ αὐτῶν θεοῦ πρόσωπον, ὄνομα Ἡρακλῆς καὶ Χρόνος. Οὕτος ὁ Ἡρακλῆς ἐγέννησεν ὑπερομέγεθες φόν, ὁ συμπληρούμενον ὑπὸ βίας τοῦ γεγεννηκότος ἐκ παρατριβῆς εἰς δύο ἐρράγη. τὸ μὲν οὖν κατὰ κορυφὴν αὐτοῦ Οὐρανὸς εἶναι ἐτελέσθη, τὸ δὲ κάτω ἐνεχθὲν Γῆ» ("For, according to him, water was the beginning of all things, and from water mud was formed, and from both was produced an animal, a dragon with the head of a lion growing to it, and between the two heads there was the face of a god, named Heracles and Chronos. This Heracles generated an egg of enormous size, which, on becoming full, was, by the powerful friction of its generator, burst into two, the part at the top receiving the form of heaven , and the lower part that of earth"), Athenagoras Athenian, *Πρεσβεία περὶ Χριστιανῶν*, PG 6, 927A-B.

<sup>6</sup> «...τὸν μὲν γὰρ ψυχοπομπὸν Ἐμῆν... ἔχε δὲ ὁάβδον μετὰ χερσίν» ("Hermes, for instance, the Conductor of Souls... he has got a rod (Cadeceus) in his hands"), Diodorus Siculus, *Ιστορικὴ Βιβλιοθήκη*, I, 96. See also Homer, *Odessee*, Ω', 1-10. See also «σύμβολον δέ ἦν τό μὲν ὄρθον ξύλον τοῦ ὄρθου λόγου, το δέ παρ' ἐκάτερα εἰδός τῶν ὄφεων, τὰ ἀντιτασσόμενα στρατόπεδα · ὁ γαρ ὄρθος λόγος δι' ἀμφοτέρων χωρεῖ», Bekker (ed.), *Thukydidis Libri I et II ex recensione Bekkeri in usum scholarum* (Berlin: A. Schone, 1874), Scholia in Liber I, 53.

<sup>7</sup> «Νύσιον ἀμπεδίον τῇ ὄρουσεν ἄναξ πολυδέγμων. ἵπποις ἀθανάτοισι Κρόνου πολυώνυμος υἱός. ἀρπάξας δ' ἀέκουσαν ἐπὶ χρυσέοισιν ὄχουσιν. ἦγ' ὀλοφυρομένην ἵάχησε δ' ἀλλ' ὄρθια φωνῆ» ("...but the wide-pathed earth yawned there in the plain of Nysa, and the lord, Host of Many, with his immortal horses sprang out upon her —the Son of Cronos, He who has many names. He caught her up reluctant on his golden car and bare her away lamenting. Then she cried out shrilly with her voice, calling..."), Homeric Hymns , *To Demeter*, 18-21. See also «καὶ Κυχρείδης ὄφις, ὃν φησιν Ἡσίοδος τραφέντα ὑπὸ Κυχρέως ἐξελαθῆναι ὑπὸ Εὐρυλόχου λυματινόμενον τὴν νῆσον, ὑποδέξασθαι δὲ αὐτὸν τὴν Δήμητρα εἰς Ἐλευσῖνα καὶ γενέσθαι ταύτης ἀμφίπολον» ("From Cychreia the serpent Cychrides had its name, which Hesiod says Cychreus bred, and Eurylochus ejected, because it infested the island, but that Ceres admitted it into Eleusis, and it became her attendant"), Strabon, *Γεωγραφικά*, IX, 1, 9. See also «ἡ δ' Ὄλυμπιας μᾶλλον ἐτέρων ζηλώσασα τὰς κατοχάς, καὶ τοὺς ἐνθουσιασμοὺς ἐξάγουσα βαρβαρικῶτερον, ὄφεις μεγάλους χειροήθεις ἐφείλκετο τοῖς θιάσοις» ("Olympias, who affected these divine possessions more zealously than other women, and carried out these divine inspirations in wilder fashion, used to provide the revelling companies with great tame serpents, which would often lift their heads from out the ivy and the mystic winnowing-baskets"), Plutarch, *Bίοι Παράλληλοι - Αλέξανδρος*, 2.7.

<sup>8</sup> «δ' ὁ ἀπὸ τῆς στοᾶς φιλόσοφος ἐν τῇ τρίτῃ τῶν ιστοριῶν διηγούμενος περὶ τοῦ Απαμέων πρὸς Λαρισαίους πολέμου γράφει τάδε· "Παραζωνίδια καὶ λογχάρι" ἀνειληφότες ἵω καὶ ὄπωρ κεκρυμμένα, πετάσια δ' ἐπιτεθειμένοι καὶ προσκόπια σκιάν μὲν ποιοῦντα'», Αθήναιος, *Δειπνοσοφιστές*, IV, 176b.,

at this position symbolizes an accomplished goal, such as the end of a battle or a campaign.

The second and main human form, has a beard and reasonably attributed to Philip II. The third portrait (to the right), depicted a female figure that holds a scepter and reminds Persephone as queen and priestess of mysteries (Photo 4). Queen Olympias in monetary, often performed as Persephone, apparently as a mother of Alexander who has been honored as god Dionysus. In Orphic mythology, Persephone was a wife of Zeus / Jupiter. Zeus who managed to enter the cave where dragons guarding her, transformed in a snake<sup>9</sup>. So according to this mythological variant, Dionysus Zagreus was born. Dionysus according to another myth is the one who restores his mother from Hades, paralleled with Hades or better, honored as equivalent to him.

At the last period of the Roman emperors Marcus Aurelius (161-180 AD) and Commodus (177-192 AD), there was a revival of the Alexander's cult. This revival's culmination reaches till the time of Caracalla. The latter on the one plundered Alexandria in 215 AD, but on the other, led the Roman divine honors of Alexander to maximum expanse. We must not forget that the projection of the "apotheosis" of Philip and Alexander's family, fits perfectly into the Roman imperial "consecratio", whereby stressing the unity of the Romans in the person of the Caesar<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> «Παρθένε Περσεφόνεια, σὺ δ' οὐ γάμον εῦρες ἀλύξαι, ἀλλὰ δρακοντείοισιν ἐνυμφεύθης ὑμεναίοις, Ζεὺς ὅτε πουλυέλικτος ἀμειβομένοιο προσώπου νυμφίος ἴμερόεντι δράκων κυκλούμενος ὀλικῷ εἰς μυχὸν ὄρφναίοι διέστιχε παρθενεῶνος, σείων δαυλὰ γένεια παρισταμένων δὲ θυρέτρῳ εύνασεν ἵστούπων πεφορημένος ὅμιμα δρακόντων... καὶ γαμίαις γενύεσσι δέμας λιχμάζετο κούρης μείλιχος. αἰθερίων δὲ δρακοντείων ὑμεναίων Περσεφόνης γονόεντι τόκῳ κυμαίνετο γαστήρ Ζαγρέα γειναμένη, κερόεν βρέφος, ὃς Διὸς ἐδρης» ("Ah, maiden Persephoneia! You could not find how to escape your mating! No, a dragon was your mate, when Zeus changed his face and came, rolling in many a loving coil through the dark to the corner of the maiden's chamber, and shaking his hairy chaps: he lulled to sleep as he crept the eyes of those creatures of his own shape who guarded the door. He licked the girl's form gently with wooing lips. By this marriage with the heavenly dragon, the womb of Persephone swelled with living fruit, and she bore Zagreus the horned baby"), Nonnos, *Διονυσιακά*, VI, 155-165.

<sup>10</sup> «Perit sexto et quinquagesimo aetatis anno atque in deorum numerum relatus est, non ore modo decernentium sed et persuasione volgi. Siquidem ludis, quos primos consecrato ei heres Augustus edebat, stella crinita per septem continuos dies fulsit exoriens circa undecimam horam, creditumque est animam esse Caesaris in caelum recepti; et hac de causa simulacro eius in vertice additur stella», Suetonius Gaius Tranquillus, *De vita Caesarum - Julius Caesar*, LXXXVIII.

In the lower part of votive relief, there is an ancient Greek inscription, which confirms the matter as concerning the consecratio of the macedonian royal dynasty. It says :

*ΑΥΡΗΛΙΟΣ ΙΟΥΛΙΑΝΟΣ ΤΟΝ ΥΙΟΝ/ ΛΥΣΙΜΑΧΟΣ*

*ΑΝΕΘΗΚΕΝ/ (Ε)ΙΣ ΘΕΟΝ ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΝ*

*(Aurelius Julianus instructed his son Lysimachus*

*to God Alexander)*



Photo 2. Alexander the Great and Philip II



Photo 3. "Parazonium sword in a roman era coin"

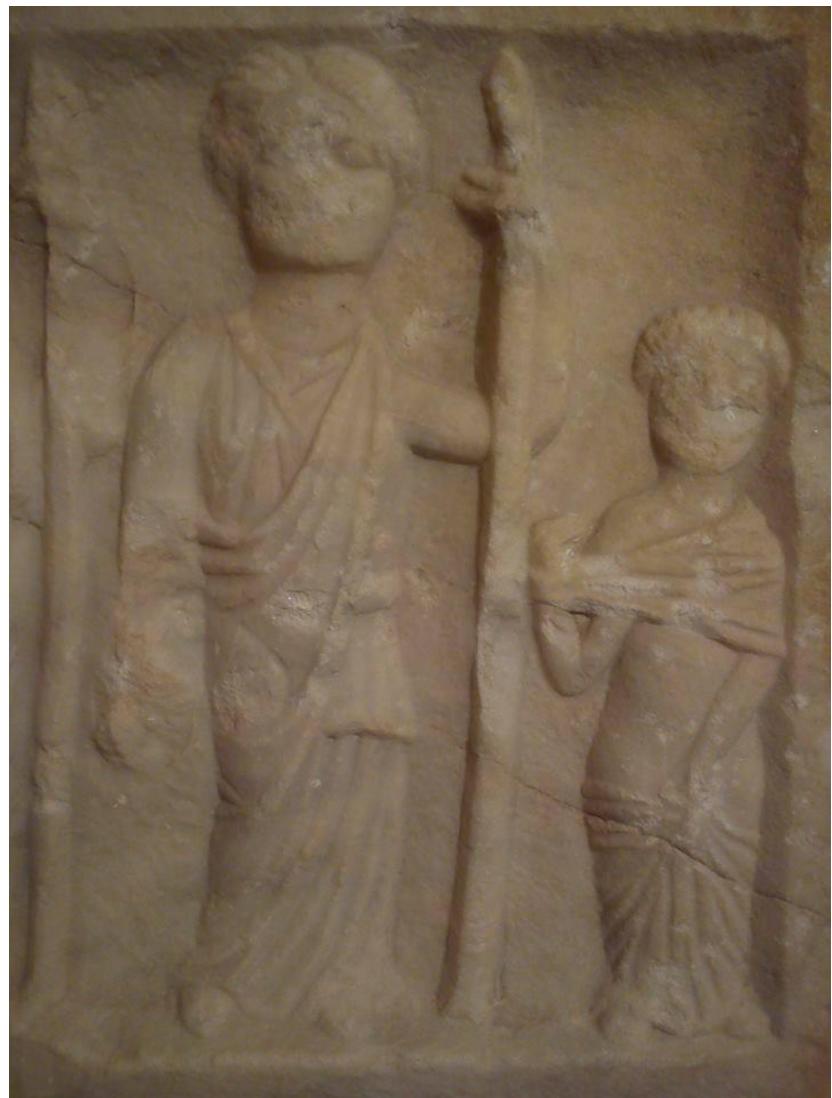


Photo 4. Olympias and propably a priestess